

GAME FACE

INDIANS SPORTSMAN MAGAZINE

Kenny Lofton...
The Spark!

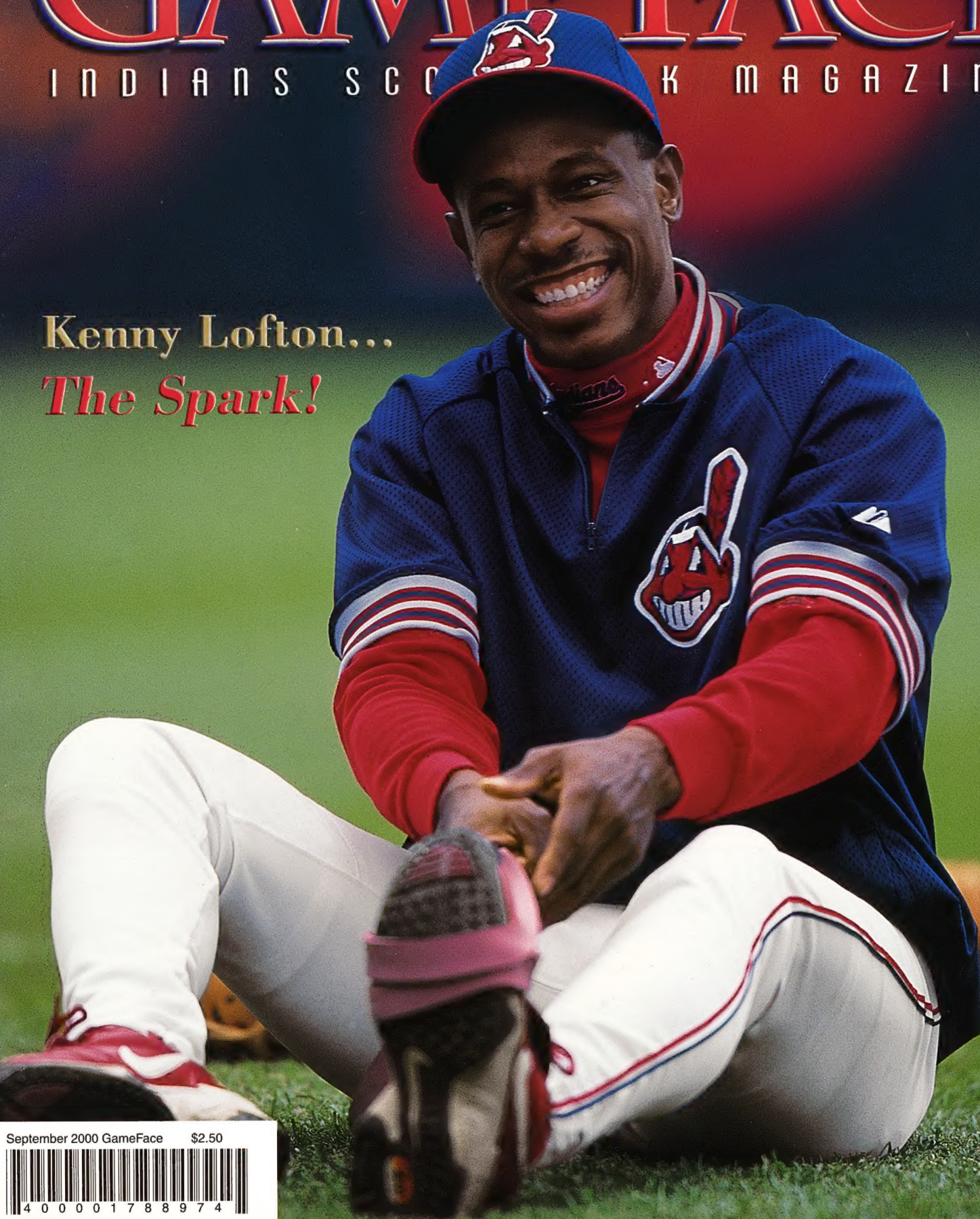


Photo: Gregory Drezdson

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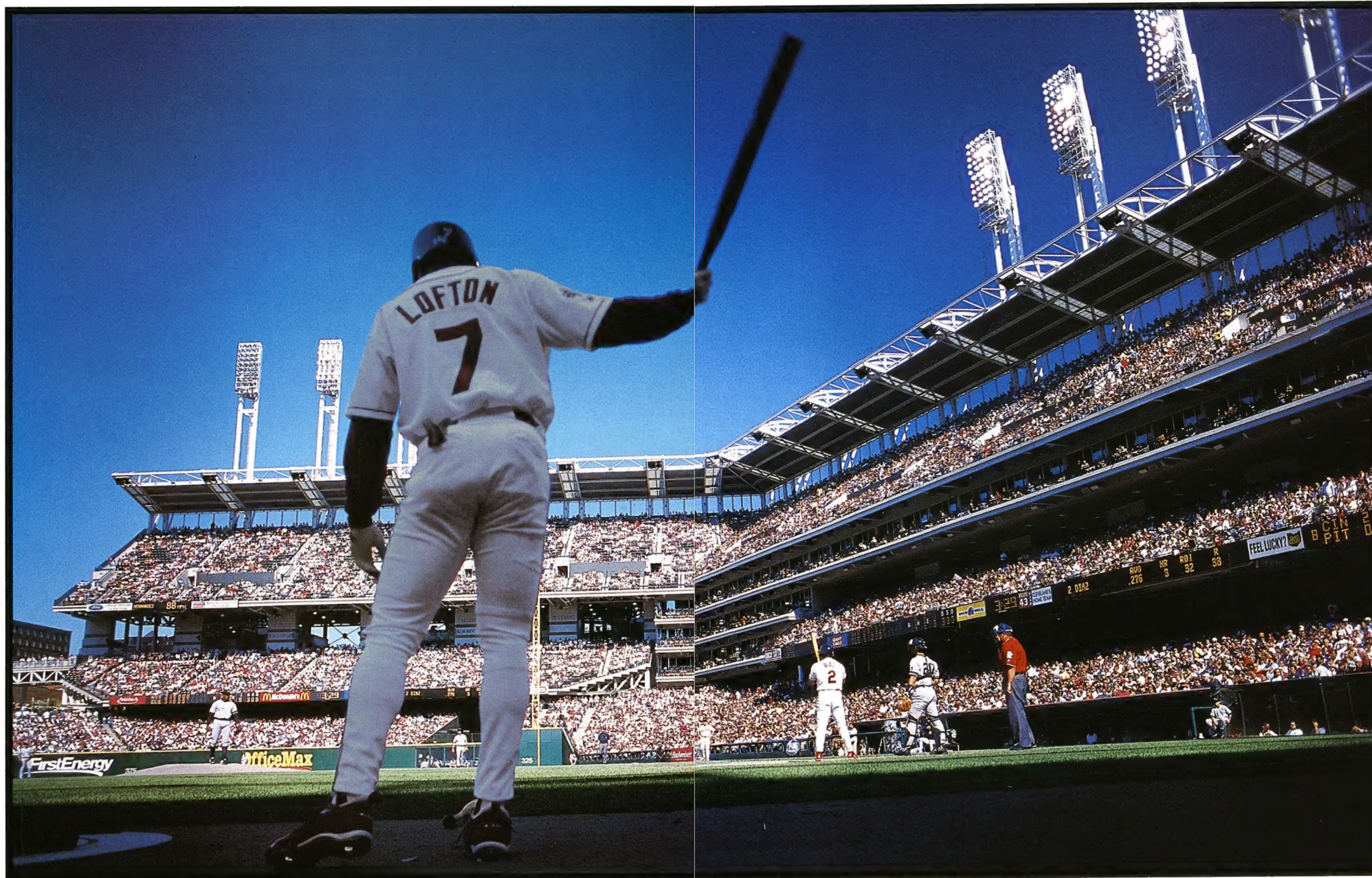


Photo: Gregory Drezdzon

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Russell Branyan is still developing as a hitter and fielder, but one thing is obvious from the first time you see him play: he holds awesome power in his bat.

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Indians fans have long enjoyed the exciting play of Kenny Lofton. Whether it's through a bunt-sacrifice, hit, homer, stolen base, or spectacular catch, the Tribe's centerfielder is a catalyst for the Indians and a momentum-killer for opposing teams. But fans might not know he's also an active advocate for area youth.

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RAW POWER

By Jim Ingraham



Talk about being a square peg in a round hole. Russell Branyan was actually a square peg in an oblong hole.

A baseball player in the heart of football country. Branyan is from Georgia, where they take their football seriously.

How seriously?

The joke goes something like this: how many seasons are there in the South? Two. Football season, and spring football practice.

"Down there, they think you're a sissy if you don't play football," Branyan says.

Oh, sure, Georgia has had some famous baseball players. The most famous of all was the Georgia Peach, Ty Cobb.

But when Cobb came storming out of the South nearly 100 years ago, football wasn't nearly as popular as it is now.

Football today is a religion in the South. But Branyan didn't go to that church.

"Everyone tried to get me to play football because it's so big down there," he says. "But I never wanted to play football. For me, it was baseball all the way."

Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Brnryan was born and still lives in Warner Robbins, GA which is located roughly in the middle of the state, about 20 minutes south of Macon and 90 minutes south of Atlanta. In other words: in the heart of football country.

"It doesn't surprise me that they tried to get him to play football," says Indians assistant general manager Mark Shapiro. "In fact I think what's overlooked about Russell sometimes is that he's a phenomenal athlete. The way he moves, his running ability, first step quickness, his body control and agility. That's all a part of being a great athlete, which Russell is. I'm sure when he was younger they saw this big, strong kid and thought he'd be a natural for football."

Wrong.

"Really, I only wanted to play baseball," says Brnryan. "It was the only sport I played growing up."

He did give basketball a brief whirl, but his heart wasn't in it.

Where was his heart?

"Baseball," he says. "The only other things I did back then was shoot pool and ride bikes."

And hit baseballs a long way.

Brnryan was always a third baseman. Always a power hitter. And always very serious about his baseball. Between the 10th and 11th grades, Brnryan

transferred from Warner Robbins High School to Stratford Academy, a private school in Macon. The coach at Stratford was Bob Hendley, a former pitcher in the Major Leagues, for the Braves, Giants, Cubs, and Mets.

"I transferred there because they had a really good baseball program, and I also liked the coach," says Brnryan.

It was at Stratford, in the heart of football country, that Brnryan honed his baseball. He was good enough as a senior in 1994 to attract the notice of not just dozens of professional scouts, but also of various colleges in the region. Indeed, on the day Brnryan was supposed to visit Georgia Tech, Major League Baseball held its annual June Draft.

Brnryan knew he had a chance to get picked, but he had no idea where, or by whom.

"I remember working at a landscaping job that day," he says. "It was really hot, and me and some of the guys were leveling out this yard after lunch. I remember joking with them at the time, saying, 'I'm probably getting drafted right about now.'"

He was right.

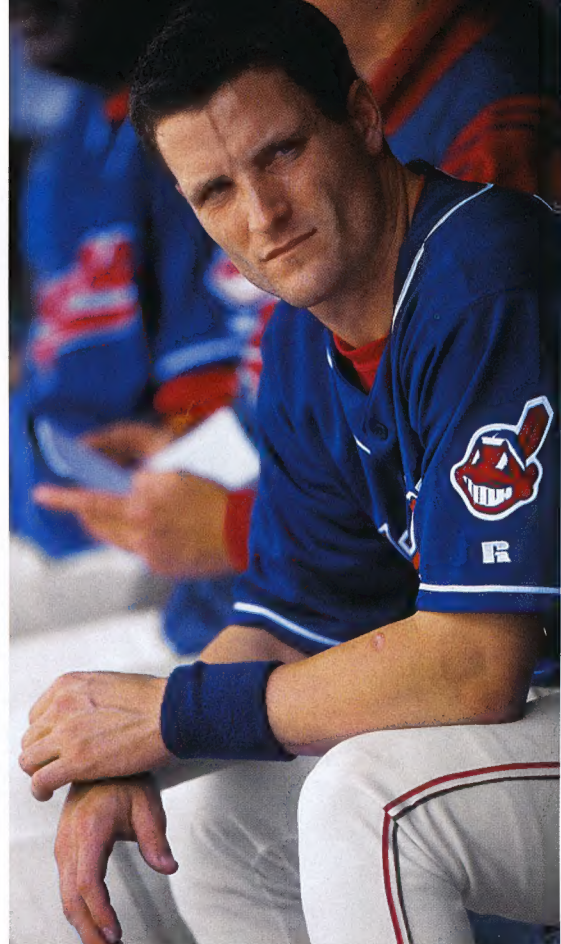


Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Brnryan went home from work that day, and there was a message for him that Indians scout Mark Germann had called to tell him the Indians had selected Brnryan in the seventh round.

"I really didn't know much about Cleveland back then, except for what I saw in that movie *Major League*," says Brnryan. "American League baseball wasn't seen much in my area."

Shapiro was the Indians farm director at the time.

"The first thing I remember about Russell, the thing our scouts all talked about when we drafted him, was his power," says Shapiro. "Raw, awesome, power. You noticed it right away. You couldn't help but notice it."

If Brnryan had a body that football coaches looked at and saw a quarterback, wide receiver or defensive back, baseball scouts saw the speed and strength, but in a different context.

"It was impossible not to notice Russell's power immediately," says Shapiro. "And what made his power so impressive is that it was easy power, not effort power."



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

For whatever reason, there wasn't a lot of grunting when Branyan hit balls over fences, across streets, and into adjoining vacant lots. Branyan had what is sometimes called "light-tower power." That means his home runs don't look like most hitters' home runs.

Branyan's home runs are frequently toweringly high, majestic clouts – not unlike the kind Jim Thome hits.

The difference is that you can tell home runs aren't easy to hit when you watch Thome hit them.

Branyan's swing makes hitting home runs long distances look easy. But it's not. Branyan's fly balls go a lot farther than many players'. But it doesn't look like it takes much effort to make them go that far.

"It's a God-given gift," says Shapiro of Branyan's powerful swing. "He has very strong hands, wrists, and forearms, which helps. But he has remarkable natural power."

In his still brief Major League career Branyan has hit some prodigious clouts, both in the regular season and in Spring Training.

A couple years ago in an exhibition game vs. the Kansas City Royals at Baseball City, FL, he launched a moon shot home run that sailed about 40 feet above the right field fence, cleared a road that runs behind the fence, and finally came down in the middle of nowhere – in an empty, barren patch of land that was minding its own business as an open field, until a Branyan-propelled baseball showed up.

**"PRIOR TO GETTING
DRAFTED I HAD ONLY
SEEN ONE MAJOR
LEAGUE GAME IN
PERSON IN MY LIFE."**

Russell Branyan



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

In an exhibition game at Toronto's SkyDome this spring, Branyan hit an opposite field home run over the left field fence that landed in the second deck. TO HIS OPPOSITE FIELD!

Branyan just shrugs when asked where all the power comes from. And don't bother to ask him to identify his longest home run.

"I always say my last one is my longest," he says.

Branyan's first professional season was in the summer of 1994, and there was really no indication that a future big leaguer was playing third base for the Indians Burlington (NC) farm team that year.

Branyan batted just .211, with five home runs and 13 RBI in 171 at-bats.

He also struck out 64 times.

Making consistent contact has always been a challenge for Branyan, who has had some gigantic strikeout totals in the Minor Leagues, such as 120 at Columbus (GA) in 1995, 166 at Columbus in 1996, and 187 at Buffalo last year.

"Russell is going to strike out a lot, because that's the type of hitter he is," says Indians manager Charlie Manuel. "We can accept the strikeouts to a certain degree, because of his power, but we'd like to see him cut down on the strikeouts. If he could cut his strikeouts to between 150 and 170, that would be good."

That first year at Burlington, Branyan had a rude awakening. After being the best player on his high school team, and in most high school games he played, he suddenly was playing games every day in the Minor Leagues against players that were just as good as he was.

"Converting to professional baseball was really tough for me," says Branyan. "Having to deal with the competition every day was a new experience."

Indeed, professional baseball differs from amateur baseball in one very basic way. Even in the Minor Leagues, baseball is no longer a hobby. It's a job. A job to be worked at. Day after exhausting day.

"I remember that first year or so you'd be working before the game for so long that by the time the game started you'd be sluggish and worn out," Branyan says. "Then your numbers wouldn't be very good, and you wondered if you'd ever make it. But you learn that all the work eventually pays off."

That's all a part of growing up and maturing as a player.

"Russell went through some tough growth periods emotionally and professionally," says Shapiro. "And I think he's a better player because of it."

In 1995, his second year in the Indians organization – the year the Indians won their first American League pen-

**"A LOT OF IT IS
PHYSICAL ABILITY,
BUT A LOT OF IT IS
MENTAL ABILITY."**

***Russell Branyan
on hitting well-placed
pitches***

nant in 41 years – Branyan played in Columbus, GA for the Tribe's low Class-A team.

He only hit .256 that year, but it was a 50-point improvement from Burlington the year before. And at Columbus he first started to flash the power that had so excited Tribe scouts, hitting 19 home runs.

Branyan's breakthrough year was 1996. Playing for the second straight year at Columbus, Branyan went on a season-long home run binge and was named the South Atlantic League's Most Valuable Player.

He blasted 40 home runs and had 106 RBI, leading the league in both categories.

The 40 home runs were a record for the South Atlantic League, and were 14 more than anyone else in the league hit that year. The highlight came on April 12 when he hit three homers in one game, in front of his friends and family at Macon.

"That was the year when I first started to think I could make it to the Major Leagues," he says.

Branyan emerged that year as the Indians top power-hitting prospect, and that didn't change over the next two years as he continued his climb up the Minor League ladder, hitting plenty of home runs, and striking out a lot at each stop along the way.

The closer Branyan got to the big leagues, the more he sometimes wondered if he'd ever make it to the big leagues in Cleveland.

"You do think about it sometimes," he says. "I mean they had star players everywhere, you wonder, when you're coming up through the

Minor Leagues, what is going to happen to you and whether you'll ever make it to Cleveland."

Branyan says the less he thought about it, the better.

"All you can do is play the best you can when you're down there, and if you're good enough you have to figure you'll make it," he says. "I think it actually made me want to do better."

Branyan had an ally, also. In 1998 his manager at Double-A Akron was former Indians catcher Joel Skinner.

"I learned a lot playing for Joel," Branyan says. "Not just on the field, but off. Stuff like not doing anything stupid. The importance of working hard. Be on time. Do your work. Keep things in perspective. That you don't have to hit a home run every time up. Joel simplified the game for me. Sometimes I tend to get over-technical. Joel slowed everything down for me."

Branyan made it to the big leagues briefly in September of 1998, then made it for a little longer last year.

On July 23 last year Branyan was called up from Class AAA Buffalo, and started that night at Yankee Stadium, vs. David Cone.

"Prior to getting drafted I had only seen one Major League game in person in my life," he says. "So when I got called up, that was really a big thrill. I had never been to Yankee Stadium before. I'd seen a lot of pictures of it. I remember being kind of nervous, being so close to the fans. You always hear about those New York fans."

In his first at-bat of the game, Branyan got his first Major League hit – a line drive home run off Cone into the seats in right field.

"That was really a good feeling to get a home run as my first hit, especially off a pitcher like Cone," Branyan says.

Branyan was eventually sent back to Buffalo. This season he has spent even more time in the Major Leagues, and that, too, has been an eye-opener.

"The thing I notice about the Major Leagues is that there is not much room



Photo: Gregory Drezdon

Kenny Lofton...

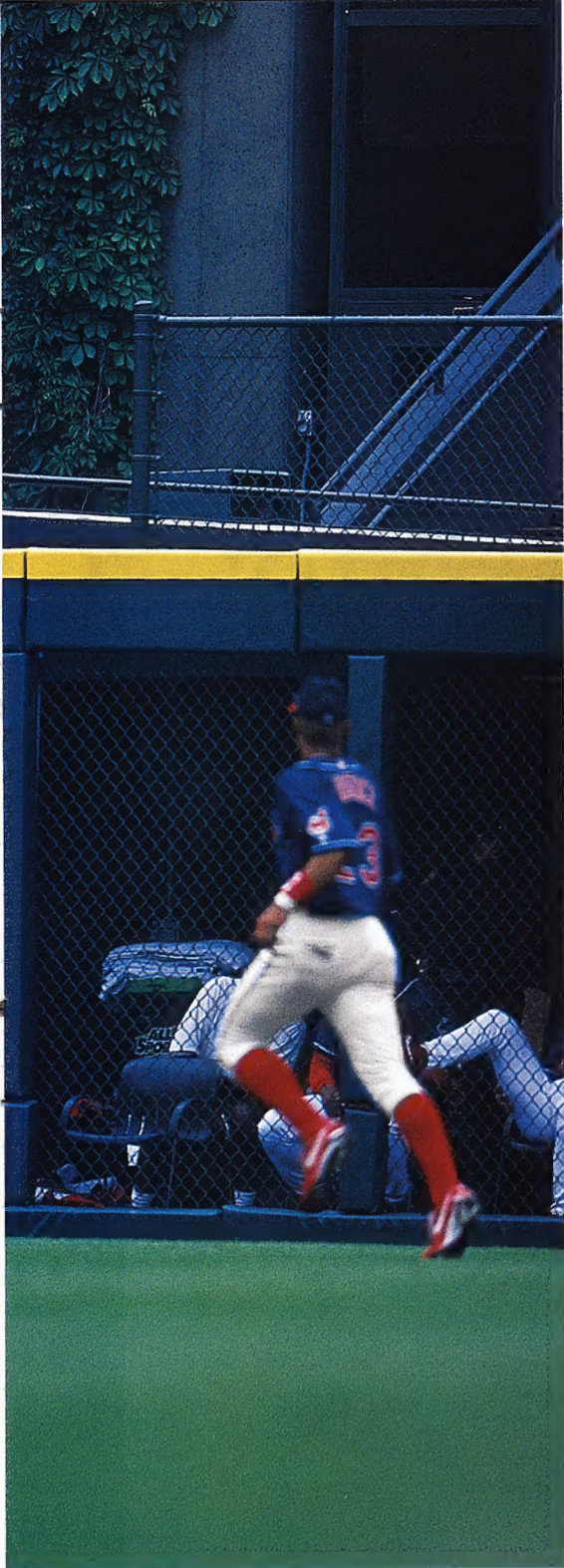


The Spark!

Photo: Gregory Drezdson

by Jeff Sibel

After losing a franchise record 105 games in 1991, the Cleveland Indians needed help. The front office created a plan that would help them escape from the basement of the American League to become one of the elite teams in all of baseball. The plan was to sign their younger players to multi-year contracts in an effort to coincide with the construction of their new ballpark. On December 10, 1991, Cleveland Indians General Manager John Hart triggered a deal, sending pitcher Willie Blair and catcher Eddie Taubensee to the Houston Astros for outfielder Kenny Lofton and infielder Dave Rhode. At the time, Hart did not know that this trade would be one of the biggest reasons for the revitalization and success of the Cleveland Indians – not only on the field but off the field as well.



Kenneth Lofton was born on May 31, 1967 in East Chicago, Indiana. Raised by his grandmother Rosie Person, Kenny's enthusiasm for baseball was evident at an early age, for Kenny is told stories by relatives of him disrupting neighborhood baseball games chasing a ball while still in diapers.

"Baseball was basically something that I was born to do. A baseball was



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

placed in my crib when I was a baby. As I got bigger, I picked up the baseball and tried to do whatever anyone else was doing," recalls Lofton. "Baseball was something that my entire family did. The women played softball while the men played baseball."

Amidst the dangers of drugs and violence, Lofton knows he would not be where he is today without the help of Person. "My grandmother was the biggest influence in my life, and she will always be. She supported everything I did and taught me everything that I learned as a child, especially

right from wrong," says Lofton. "Without her, I don't know if I would have been able to make the choices that I

**"1995 WAS
EXTREMELY EXCITING
FOR ME. IT WAS
SOMETHING THAT I
WILL NEVER FORGET."**

Kenny Lofton



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Lofton talks "game" with (l to r) bench coach Grady Little and manager Charlie Manuel.

made, enabling me to ultimately have the success that I have."

Lofton used sports to get away from the trouble in his neighborhood. However, while Lofton tore up the local baseball diamonds in high school, it was a different ball that gave him his ticket to college. Basketball. He went to the University of Arizona on a basketball scholarship. At Arizona, Lofton starred at point guard, leading the Wildcats to a Final Four appearance. After his four years at Arizona, Lofton

knew he would not play competitive basketball, and thought his sports career was over – little did he know he had another option.

He was selected by the Houston Astros in the 17th round of the June 1988 draft, thanks to a tip by an Arizona assistant baseball coach who saw Lofton play just five baseball games his entire time at Arizona. The Astros liked Lofton for one reason. His speed. The sport that he first loved was now giving him a second chance.

His passion and willingness to learn enabled Lofton to power his way through the Astros farm system. He spent three years in Single A baseball, then made the jump to Triple A Tucson for the 1991 season. He hit .308 at Tuscon, leading the league in at-bats, hits,

triples and putouts, thus earning him a September call-up to the Astros. Following the season he was traded to Cleveland.

The trade was made because Houston had a capable centerfielder in Steve Finley and Cleveland was looking for a young centerfielder as they started their rebuilding process. Current Indians Manager Charlie Manuel, who then was the Manager at Triple A Colorado Springs, was actually the one who mentioned to Hart that they should try to get Lofton. At the time Hart said of Lofton, "He was a little crude, but you could tell he had the tools and some of the things that he did just made you say 'wow.' "

Lofton admits that he was confused by the trade at first. "They told me I was going to be part of their future in Houston," he recalled. "But I am very happy where I am now. Cleveland told me that I would have the opportunity

**LOFTON HAS
ACCOMPLISHED MANY
FEATS ... HE IS THE
INDIANS ALL-TIME
CAREER STOLEN-BASE
LEADER ... A FOUR-
TIME RAWLINGS
GOLD GLOVE
CENTERFIELDER.**



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

plains. "The fans root for me and support me, and by doing some of the things that I do, it's my way of saying 'thank you' to the fans."

Lofton does not participate in the programs for the attention or the accolades, but rather to try and give people a chance, the same chance that he was given (and took advantage of) to succeed.

Lofton has participated in the RBI (*Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities*) program each year that he has been a member of the Cleveland Indians. As part of the program, he speaks to the kids and advises them of the importance of balancing education with athletics.

"The RBI program is very important to me, because it gives the inner city kids an opportunity that they sometimes might not get due to a lack of funds and support. All the kids in the inner city need is an opportunity. It gives them a chance, and that's what I got when I was younger," says Lofton. "I got a chance to go out and play little league ball, and I want to help these kids get that chance as well. If the kids don't have that, then they are going to do other things such as violence, drugs, and alcohol that will eventually get them in trouble and you don't need kids to be involved in that."

Last season, Lofton was an honorary spokesperson for *Breaking Barriers*, a program developed by Major League Baseball based on the life of Jackie Robinson. Along with Sharon Robinson, daughter of the late Jackie Robinson, the two spoke to students at schools on overcoming obstacles and the importance of education.

In addition to these programs, Lofton has also started his own foundation. The **Kenny Lofton Youth Foundation**, which was established in 1998, supports programs that provide eco-



Photo: Gregory Drezdzon

nomically and socially disadvantaged children with opportunities to improve academic success, pursue higher education, and participate in activities that promote discipline, commitment, and integrity.

Lofton says, "My foundation tries to help out the youth in the Cleveland

**"WHEN I FOUND
OUT THAT I HAD A
CHANCE TO COME
BACK EARLY, I
WORKED AS HARD
AS I POSSIBLY
COULD HAVE."**

***Kenny Lofton on his
rehab after last
year's post-season
shoulder injury***

area, mainly the inner city, where kids may not have the support they need to help them get involved and grow as individuals." He adds, "I know growing up I didn't have much, and I know how tough it was. I just want to make it easier on the kids. I've always said that kids are our future and we need to make sure they are headed in the right direction."

In an effort to raise funds for his foundation, Lofton holds a charity golf event. Proceeds from this year's event benefit the Cleveland Scholarship Programs, which is committed to helping Cleveland area youth reach their potential through higher education.

Indians fans have seen Lofton's impact on the baseball field with both

his glove and bat. Few have seen the impact he has made off the field.

"Kenny has had a tremendous impact on the kids that he has talked to. The kids really look forward to seeing him," says Indians Director of Community Relations Allen Davis. "They feel he's more credible because he has gone through what most of the kids are going through. They appreciate that he takes time out of his busy schedule to talk with them."

"I have noticed also the effect that the kids have on Kenny as well," explained Davis. "The enthusiasm and sincerity in his voice tells me he truly cares about the kids, and that he wants to make a difference in their lives."

This season has been a trying one, not only for the Indians as a team, but for Lofton as well. Lofton tore the rotator cuff in his left shoulder sliding head first into first base during Game Five of last season's Division Series. He had surgery last December, and spent the entire off-season rehabbing. It was the first time in his career that he was seriously injured, and this was threatening his chance to play a full season. He

**"WHEN KENNY
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PRETTY GOOD HITTER
AS WELL."**

***Manager Charlie
Manuel***

wasn't supposed to be back until the All-Star break, but Lofton was in the starting lineup on April 3 in Baltimore, three months ahead of schedule.

Clearly his shoulder was not 100 percent, but that didn't stop Lofton from going out and giving it his all. "When I found out that I had a chance to come back early, I worked as hard as I possibly could have," said Lofton. "I'm a team player. I didn't want to sit back and watch the team try to win without me there. If the team is going to win, I want to be there; and if the team is going to lose, I still want to be there. You win as a team and you lose as a team.

"I like to play every day. I don't like to sit. I was excited about the opportunity this team had at the start of the season, and although this season hasn't gone quite as planned, I still like our chances."

The Indians are in jeopardy of not making the playoffs for the first time since the 1994 season. Injuries have hit the Indians hard this season, and

are a big reason why the Indians are in a tough battle for a playoff berth. However, the Indians will not use injuries as a reason for their decline, and Lofton will not use his injury either as an excuse for his less-than-average season.

"Maybe I'm not 100 percent in terms of health, but a lot of people aren't 100 percent and they are out there playing," admits Lofton. "When you are hurt, everything changes a bit because you are mentally frustrated about the injury, and physically you are frustrated because you're not performing as you should be."

For it seems that as Lofton goes, so do the Indians. Last season the Indians scored a franchise-record 1009 runs. Lofton, along with Omar Vizquel and Roberto Alomar, were the main reasons they scored as many runs as they did.

"When Kenny gets on base, he kind of gets the team going. Not only can he steal a base, but he also breaks the pitcher down a little bit in that the pitcher is worrying about Kenny and not the batter," says Indians Manager Charlie Manuel. "His speed alone causes havoc to the other team, not to mention the fact that he's a pretty good hitter as well."

And Lofton not only can spark the offense, the sparkling defense that he has played can also demoralize the opposition as well. His leaping catches and diving grabs have not only killed some opponents' rallies, but preserved some victories for the Tribe as well.

"I always say that defense is going to win the game. You have to have great defense, because even though you might be able to score a lot of runs, you have to stop your opponent as well," says Lofton. "To me, I think making a great catch or a good defensive play is much more exciting than hitting a home run. When you stop the other team from scoring a run, not only does it help your chances of winning, but sometimes it stops their momentum."

Lofton is going to do everything he can possibly do to see that the Indians make the playoffs this season. He is not about to give up now. It was a challenge for Lofton to get out of the inner city, to make it back from the shoulder surgery, and it will be a challenge for him to help get the Indians into the playoffs this season. One thing is sure, though: you can count on Lofton to give his best effort in getting them there.



Photo: Gregory Drezdson



Photo: Gregory Drezdzon

Heart 'n

"Good Morning, Mr. Sportswriter. You're looking at photographs of Sandy Alomar, Jr., veteran catcher of the Cleveland Indians. Six times an All-Star, American League Rookie of the Year and Gold Glove winner, Alomar is regarded by many as the foundation on which the resurgence of baseball in Cleveland has been built.

"Your mission, Mr. Sportswriter, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT, is to tell the story of Sandy Alomar's decade of prominence with the Indians, from his 1990 American League Rookie of the Year Award until the present – without mentioning any of his injuries, or speculating what he might have achieved had he played relatively injury-free.

"Should you mention as much as a hangnail, or give up in frustration because the story of Sandy Alomar, Jr. CAN'T be told without mentioning his injuries, the editors of GAME FACE will disavow all knowledge of your existence.

"Good Luck, Mr. Sportswriter. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds."



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Sandy Alomar doesn't talk about his injuries, so why should a writer? When asked if his faith in God has ever been shaken because of the physical misfortune that has bedeviled him throughout his career, Alomar laughs and says, "Not at all. I'm just grateful for the great seasons He's let me enjoy."

Typical Alomar. Given enough lemons to sour the attitude of even the most optimistic, Alomar chooses to make lemonade for each of the 42,000 fans who pack Jacobs Field nightly. His great seasons may not have come in succession. But they have come frequently enough to show the skills Alomar has, the vigor with which he plays, and the respect he commands. Take away the injuries and – OOPS!. Sorry. The mission says no speculating on how great Alomar might have been without the injuries.

Take 1997, for example, the greatest of Alomar's seasons with the Tribe. In the Broadway musical, *Damn Yankees*, a middle-aged fan sells his soul to the devil in return for a season in which his long-suffering ballclub wins the pennant, and the fan becomes the team's star.

OK, so maybe Alomar wasn't a fan in 1997. He was already one of baseball's best catchers. And although the long-suffering Indians had already won the pennant two years earlier, the similarity between New York's Broadway and Jacobs Field's Eagle Avenue still exist. Many believe Sandy



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

Alomar brings all the tools to his catching game: great defense (left), an ability to call a good game and counsel his pitching staff (above), and a strong bat (Alomar was batting .315 as of August 11).

Alomar made a deal with some supernatural power in 1997. Every time the Indians needed a clutch hit in 1997, Alomar seemed to be the Tribesman delivering it.

"I didn't make a deal with anybody in '97," Alomar says, again laughingly. "I know the story of *Damn Yankees* and nobody came offering me anything in exchange for my soul."

Soul

by Bill Needle

One must wonder, though. In 1997, Alomar hit .324, a career-best, and established personal big-league highs in at-bats, runs, hits, doubles, homers, and runs batted in. Toss in a 30-game hitting streak and even the biggest Alomar fan might wonder if Mr. Aplegate, Lola, Joe Hardy, the Washington Senators, and those darn Yankees themselves aren't waiting for Alomar to pay his end of some hellish bargain.

"It was just one of those years when everything came together," Alomar says. "I was feeling good for the whole season and I got off to a good start. Ninety-six was a good year, too and '97 just kinda kept building as the year went on."

Not exactly. Actually, 1997 started off sensationally for Alomar and then got even better. Perhaps the ups-and-downs of the Tribe since their star-crossed run to the World Series against Florida have diminished the memories of exactly what Alomar did in '97, but a look back at the sheer brilliance of his performance could easily make one wonder if the part of soul-selling Joe Hardy was played throughout the '97 season by Santos Velazquez Alomar, Jr.

He started the season by homering in five straight games, tying a franchise record held by Hall-of-Famer Larry Doby and former AL MVP Al Rosen.

"HE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO THE DANGEROUS STUFF— DIRT BIKES AND WANTING TO BE A PILOT ... SANDY NEVER SEEMED AS INTERESTED IN THE GAME AS ROBBIE."

*Sandy Alomar, Sr.
on his eldest son's
interests as a
youngster*

In May, he began the 30-game hitting streak that lasted all of June, ending on July 6, one game shy of the franchise record held by another Hall-of-Famer, Nap Lajoie. Throughout the year there were other substantial milestones: four doubles in four at-bats to tie a Major League record, a .352 batting average with men on base, 83 RBI for the highest total by a catcher in Indians history,

and an astounding .583 batting average with the bases loaded.

But the numbers do not reflect the drama of Alomar's '97 performance. Baltimore's Mike Mussina took a perfect game into the ninth inning against the Tribe on May 30. It was Alomar who singled after 25 Indians were retired consecutively. Alomar's base hit against the Yankees in September clinched the Central Division title and his homer in Game Four of the Division Series, also against the Yankees, staved off elimination.

Alomar's greatest dramatic feat in '97, however, came at Jacobs Field in the All-Star Game. Remember? Tie score in the seventh, Shawn Estes of the Giants on the mound? Alomar's two-run homer earned him the game's MVP Award – the only time a player has won the award in his home park.

"I talked to my father [15-year ML veteran, Sandy, Sr.] a lot before that season," Alomar remembers. "He told me to take a chance and drive the ball. Because I'm a big guy, if I'm going to hit .270, I might as well try to hit with some power. That year, I did."

"Sandy is a contact hitter," says Charlie Manuel. "He used to chase bad pitches and get himself out. But he learned to work the count more and hit better pitches harder. The best thing about '97 for Sandy was that he learned he's a much better hitter than he thought he was."

The cynics will say, "That was then, this is now," in response to Alomar's brilliance of three seasons ago. "What has Sandy Alomar done for the Indians lately?" Sidelined for a month early in 2000 by a hamstring – OOPS! Sorry, almost talked about an injury there...

Put it this way. Early this season, Einar Diaz showed many he could handle the regular catching duties, hitting well over .300 and throwing out potential base-stealers regularly. More than a few self-appointed experts decided it was time for Alomar to step aside, to allow Diaz to assume the role of the Tribe's primary backstop.

Those "experts" failed to calculate Alomar's competitive fire. Through the end of July, Alomar's batting average



Photo: Gregory Drezdson

HEART 'N SOUL

continued from page 50

teenager was tested often – especially knowing more about Major League life because of his father's experience than what life in the low Minors would be like when he signed with the Padres in 1984.

"We spent a lot of time at Yankee Stadium as kids," Alomar says. "In fact, I wear number 15 because of Thurman Munson. I used to watch him sitting behind the plate wearing all this gear, the only guy looking at the whole game. One Christmas, I asked for catcher's equipment and that's how I became a catcher.

"So I knew what the big leagues were like at an early age, hanging around with my father. But in the Minors, you've got to sacrifice for your goals. People don't know what you go through in the Minors to get to the Majors.

"I once lived in an apartment with no bed. No kidding. I didn't have enough money to buy a bed. Sometimes for lunch, I'd eat a candy bar. That's it – a candy bar.

"I sure wasn't going to ask my family for money. I wanted to make it all on my own."

The will to succeed Alomar showed by subsisting without a bed and by dining on chocolate bars as a Minor Leaguer hasn't been diminished by his decade of success



Photo: Gregory Drezdon



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Sat. May 20	vs. New York	1:05PM	Tues. July 4	vs. Toronto	1:05PM	Sun. Sept. 3	vs. Baltimore	1:05PM
Sun. May 21	vs. New York	1:05PM	Sat. July 15	vs. Pittsburgh	1:05PM	Sat. Sept. 9	vs. Chicago	1:05PM
Sat. June 10	vs. Cincinnati	1:05PM	Sun. July 16	vs. Houston	1:05PM	Sun. Sept. 10	vs. Chicago	1:05PM
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Sun. June 25	vs. Detroit	1:05PM	Sat. Aug. 19	vs. Seattle	1:05PM			

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"¡NO PIERDAS NI UNA JUGADA!"



as a Major Leaguer. He still wants to make it without admitting a weakness or by asking anybody for help.

"Sandy will play hurt," says Tribe bullpen coach Luis Issac, who has known Alomar since childhood. "And he won't tell anybody. I tell him he's got to tell somebody when he's hurt. I tell him he should be honest. But he tries to play with an injury and then it's too late, and he has to miss a bunch of games. He's gotten better about that. But it kills him when he can't play."

"I love to play so much," Alomar says, "that sometimes I've come back too fast."

More than his statistics, his game-winning hits and even his supernatural season of 1997, the most appealing parts of Sandy Alomar are the immeasurable qualities that make him who he is. His maniacal desire to succeed on his own is a big part of his appeal. So is his warrior-like attitude toward injury and his total disregard for a body better suited for shooting guard in the NBA than catching in the Major Leagues.

Alomar has presence, as the media consultants like to say. Were he of the time of the great Hispanic dynasties of Latin America, he would

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certainly have been the king; tall, imposing, wise, regal, respected, admired.

"Sandy Alomar is pure class," says Rob DeWolf, a former Triple-A teammate. "At age 22, he could have been the starting catcher for two-thirds of the Major League teams. But he kept getting sent back to the Minors because he was trying to beat out Benito Santiago, who was the best catcher in the National League at the time.

"A lot of guys would have popped off to the media or pouted the season away or demanded to be traded. But Alomar did none of that. Even at 22, he showed a tremendous amount of maturity. He took the attitude that he would show the Padres – and the rest of baseball – that he was a Major League catcher."

"Going back to the Minors was tough on Sandy," adds his father. "He was the MVP of the Pacific Coast League and the Minor League Player of the Year. Luckily, I was a coach with the Padres at the time and I talked a lot with him that spring, encouraging him to go back down and show the other clubs he could play."

The sum of Alomar's qualities adds up to his largest contribution to the Indians – his leadership. Clearly, the Tribe's clubhouse is Alomar's domain;

Photo: Gregory Drezdson



from his double cubicle next to the entrance to the players' private area, one can supervise the entire room, in much the same way Alomar supervises the entire field from behind home plate.

"I can voice my opinion and I do," Alomar says. "But this team has veteran players who know what they've got to do and they do it.

"I don't think the word 'leadership' is always explained the right way.

You don't have to hit .400 or hit 40 homers to be a leader. You lead by example, by playing hard every day – running hard to first base every time, playing the game the way it's supposed to be played."

There's no minimizing the respect Alomar elicits from his pitchers, either. "I put my entire trust in Sandy Alomar," says Charles Nagy. "He knows me better than I know myself. He just tells me what to throw and where to throw it. He's a good receiver and a great target. Nobody blocks balls in the dirt as good as Sandy – nobody."

Charlie Manuel seconds Nagy's emotions. "Besides Pudge Rodriguez, who's a better catcher in the American League than Sandy?"

There aren't many – if any. And even if the assignment forbids specula-

tion about what Alomar might have achieved were he not so frequently injured, one can't avoid thinking what might have been.

And when one thinks what might have been, given what Alomar has achieved despite the injuries, the speculation stops.

The injuries have healed. Alomar's reputation will endure.

"I DON'T THINK THE WORD 'LEADERSHIP' IS ALWAYS EXPLAINED THE RIGHT WAY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIT .400 OR HIT 40 HOMERS TO BE A LEADER. YOU LEAD BY EXAMPLE, BY PLAYING HARD EVERY DAY – RUNNING HARD TO FIRST BASE EVERY TIME, PLAYING THE GAME THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE PLAYED."

Sandy Alomar, Jr.

Silver Lining

by Steve Herrick

The one silver lining to come out of the rash of injuries to the Indians pitching staff this season has been the emergence of Justin Speier and Jamie Brewington.

While neither was considered to be in the Tribe's plans this season, both have stepped up to claim big roles in the bullpen.

"They've both done a solid job for us," said Indians manager Charlie Manuel. "They've pitched some big innings for us and have been a boost to our bullpen."

The two pitchers – both righthanders – were unknowns to Tribe fans at the beginning of the season. Speier, 24, was claimed off waivers from the Atlanta Braves on November 23 of last year. He started the season at Class AAA Buffalo and was called up May 25. Brewington, signed before the 1999 season as a Minor League free agent, also started the season at Buffalo and was called up June 2.

Both have overcome big odds to earn their spots on the Tribe's roster. Speier, the 55th round pick of the

Chicago Cubs in 1995, is pitching for his fourth organization in the last three years. Brewington thought his career might be over after he missed all of the 1998 season because of surgery for a torn labrum in his right shoulder.

Both pitchers think their past experiences have helped them.

"The more experience I got, I just figured out how to pitch a little more," said Speier. "It helped me be the pitcher I could be. It's been really exciting. It's been great since I've been here. I'll try to keep it going and finish strong."



Photo: Gregory Drezdon

"I'm definitely happy," said Brewington. "You couldn't have put together a better script after the last couple of seasons."

Many young pitchers are afraid to throw strikes, but that hasn't been the case with Speier and Brewington.

"I learned to be aggressive and go right after hitters," said Speier. "I've got seven guys behind me. Especially on this team, when you have All-Stars at almost every position, you have to let the defense help you win."

"I've learned how to stop nibbling and be aggressive," said Brewington. "I didn't have the luxury of doing that before. You're going to get hit sometimes, but that can't stop you from being aggressive."

Speier credits his aggressive attitude to his father, Chris, who was a shortstop for San Francisco, Montreal, St. Louis, Minnesota, and the Chicago Cubs from 1971-89.

"I was taught at a young age to be aggressive and trust my instincts," said Speier.

"My dad played hard. He was very intense and very aggressive. I tried to bring those intangibles into my game. He was a huge influence in my game."

Being part of the game at a young age helped Speier.

"I was lucky," he said. "I got to see the sights and sounds of the clubhouse from the time I was a kid until I was 15 years old. I was pretty lucky. I got to have the best advice and get good gloves. I got to see how the Major Leaguers do it. When you grow up in a baseball family, you get used to the lifestyle and the travel and what's expected of a baseball player. You have to have a love for the game."

Chris Speier is now the third base coach for the Milwaukee Brewers. So when Justin appeared for the Indians on June 5 in Milwaukee, the game had special meaning.

Speier pitched with his father a few feet away in the third base coach's box. Speier had also pitched against his dad's teams in the Arizona Fall League and at Spring Training. "It's pretty nice to get to see him," said Speier. "It's special to pitch against his teams."

Asked if the two talked to each other during the game, Speier said, "No, I saw him and he saw me. We went out to dinner after the game."

The lessons Speier learned helped him immediately when he entered pro ball.

"When you're a 55th round draft choice you better get after it quick or you won't be around too long," said Speier. "I had to show them I could pitch."

Speier also had to adjust to a position change.

"I was a catcher for six years, two in high school and four in college," he said. "I pitched about 15 innings in college. All the Cubs had to go on was that I had a good arm. They converted me to a pitcher."

Speier progressed through the Cubs farm system and made it to the big leagues in 1998. His debut came on May 27 against Philadelphia when he allowed two runs in 1-1/3 innings. Speier was traded to Florida on July 31 and spent the rest of the season with the Marlins, going 0-3 with an 8.38 ERA in 18 games. Speier went to Spring Training with the Marlins in 1999, but was traded to Atlanta on April 1. He was sent to Class AAA Richmond and then got called up to the Braves. He was in Atlanta from April 14 to June 27 and had no record with a 5.65 ERA in 19 appearances.

"I got traded twice and I got picked up on waivers," said Speier. "Every organization I've been in has been a great experience for me."

Speier averages between 90 and 95 mph. "I rely more on location than velocity," he said.

Speier uses a three-quarter's motion in his delivery. "I've always thrown



Photo: Gregory Drezdon

In an injury-filled season, Speier (left), and Brewington (above), have alleviated some of the strain on the Tribe's pitching staff.

that way," he said. "That came from watching my dad throw from down under at shortstop. My ball has good movement and good tail. On days I can control my fastball, it's pretty good."

Speier also throws a slider and split-finger fastball. "I use both when I'm behind in the count," he said. "I use all three pitches to keep hitters off-balance."

Speier picked up his first Major League win on June 18 when he pitched 3-2/3 perfect innings with seven strikeouts in Detroit.

Brewington was selected by San Francisco in the 10th round of the 1992 draft and made it to the Giants in 1995. He was called up on July 23 and won his Major League debut the following day by holding Florida to three runs in seven innings.



Brewington finished tied for second on the Giants in wins and ended the season with a 6-4 record and a 4.54 ERA.

Brewington first hurt his shoulder pitching in the Arizona Fall League after the 1995 season, but tried to pitch through the injury.

"At that time I knew something was up," he said. "My arm hurt, but after a long break it felt OK. I was being kind of naive. I was a young kid. I wanted to be known as a hard worker who gave it his all every time out. I was kind of pig-headed in a sense. I'll know better next time."

Instead of making the Giants in 1996, he spent the entire season at Class AAA Phoenix. The Giants traded him to Kansas City after the season on November 26. With his arm still hurting, he struggled at two Minor League stops for the Royals before being traded to Milwaukee on July 30 for former Indian Jason Grimsley. Brewington spent the rest of the season at Class AAA Tucson. He went to the Brewers Minor League camp in 1998, but was released in April and had surgery.

Brewington was faced with more than rehabbing his shoulder. He needed a job to support his wife, Debbie, and daughter, Samantha. Brewington decided to open a catering business, featuring barbecue pork and chicken. After working out from 8 AM to 12:30 PM, he'd come home and start

cooking. There were times his arm hurt too much to play with his daughter, who was born in 1997.

"I was put in a situation where I had to have an income," said Brewington. "I cooked and people ordered food. I needed something to get the bills paid. I learned how to work."

That was a far cry from life in the big leagues.

"It was worse than the real world," said Brewington, whose son, Chancellor was born last year. "To cater, you have to put money into it to get the business started. It was something to get us by at that moment. I don't want to get to that point again."

Brewington wanted to give pitching another try. He set up a time when teams could come watch him throw near his home in Tempe, Arizona. The Indians were the only team to attend.

"Other teams were supposed to show up, but no one else did," said Brewington.

"Keith Boeck (a scout for the Indians) gave me a great recommendation

from what I understand. He put his name on the line for me."

Brewington spent all of last season at Class A Kinston, where he went 1-10 with a 3.87 ERA in 36 games.

"I thought everything I did was magnified, but they reassured me it doesn't matter what your numbers are," said Brewington. "You don't find that a lot. I was learning how to pitch again. After a year off, it was kind of hard to get the feel back for attacking hitters again."

Brewington's velocity increased about midway through the season. (He also throws a sinker and a slider.)

"It just popped up," he said. "It came overnight. I went from throwing 91-92 mph to 94-96 mph."

A win in Milwaukee on June 7 was his first since September 28, 1995, a total of 1,713 days between victories. He pitched 2-2/3 hitless innings in a 9-5 win.

"I couldn't ask for a better place to be," said Brewington.

In a season where bad luck has dogged the Indians at every turn, the Tribe's bullpen is a better place to be with Speier and Brewington in it.

Left: Speier receives the counsel of veteran catcher, Sandy Alomar, Jr.

Below: Manager Charlie Manuel discusses pitching strategy for an upcoming batter with Brewington and catcher, Einar Diaz.



Both photos: Gregory Drezdson

seem to find the words to describe any of them.

No Modesty Zone

Their reputations preceded them; their performances *often* followed. Pitcher Willis "Ace" Hudlin was a solid workhorse of the depression-era Tribe; Duster "the Great" Mails was the unexpected savior of the 1920 pennant race; Rico "Big Mon" Carty enjoyed success with the Tribe after a great career with Atlanta; and "Super Joe" Charboneau took home the 1980 AL Rookie of the Year award before injuries wrecked his career. Joe "the Immortal Cuban" Azcue and "Hard Hittin' " Mark Whiten had their moments as well. "Wonderful Willie" Smith was both a backup outfielder and a very respectable relief pitcher in the 1960s, a pretty unique distinction in the post-Babe Ruth era.

You Are What You Eat

Indians culinary nicknames encompassed three of the four food groups and even left room for dessert. Pitcher "Strawberry Bill" Bernhard had some

great years for the brand new Cleveland franchise of the early 1900s; outfielder Nick "Tomato Face" Cullop and catcher George "Pickles" Gerken had "cups of coffee" in the Bigs; and pitcher Camilo Pascual, a.k.a. "Little Potato," came to Cleveland in 1971 to complete his successful career.

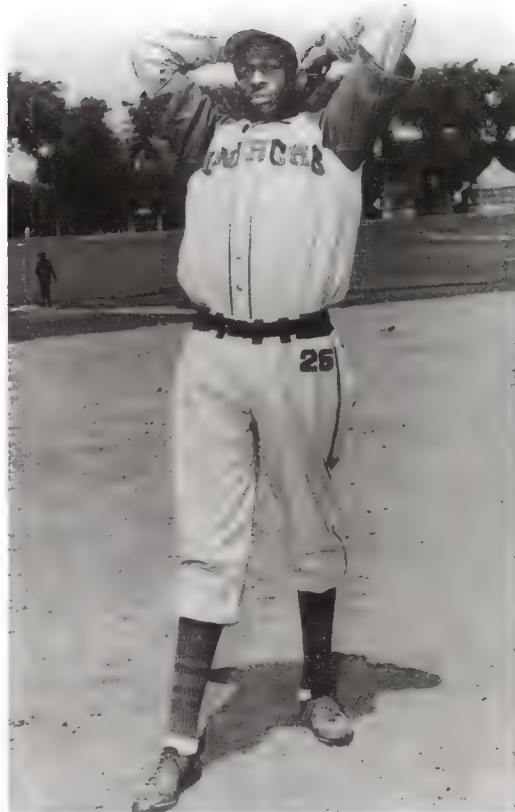
Power-hitting catcher John "Honey" Romano and third baseman Willie "Puddin' Head" Jones were teammates for a brief while on the 1959 Indians.

Back-Back-Back to Berman

Not too long ago, ESPN's popular broadcaster Chris Berman seemed to have developed a cottage industry by referring to Major Leaguers with play-on-word nicknames in his SportsCenter highlights programs.

The best Indians Bermanisms as selected by this reporter, who has himself adopted a Berman

continued, see Nickname Nostalgia, page 88



Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University

Leroy "Satchel" Paige, who played more than two decades with the Negro League Monarchs, made his first appearance for the Indians on July 9, 1948.

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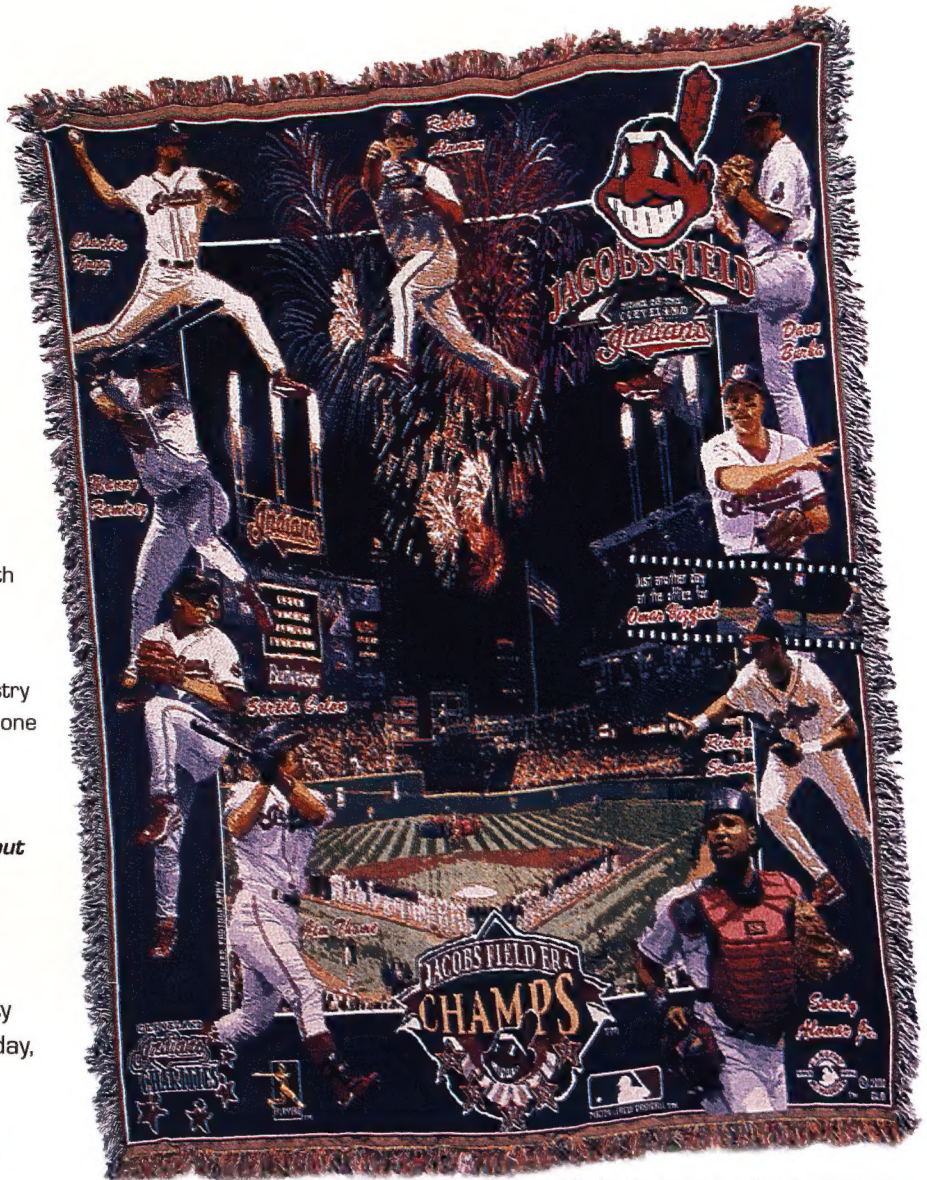
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Indians

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THE CLEVELAND INDIANS



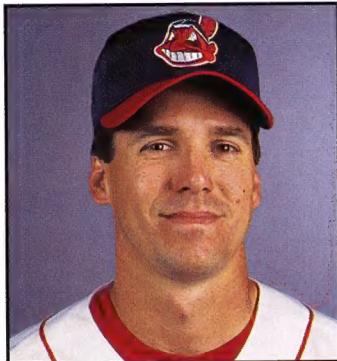
**Chuck
FINLEY**

31

Age: 37, born November 26, 1962
in Monroe, LA

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'6" Wt: 226



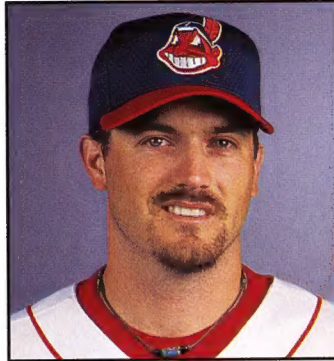
**Travis
FRYMAN**

17

Age: 31, born March 25, 1969
in Lexington, KY

Position: Infielder

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'1" Wt: 195



**Chris
HANEY**

44

Age: 31, born November 16, 1968
in Baltimore, MD

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'3" Wt: 210



**Steve
KARSAY**

20

Age: 28, born March 24, 1972
in Flushing, NY

Position: Pitcher

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'3" Wt: 209



Photo: Gregory Drezdson



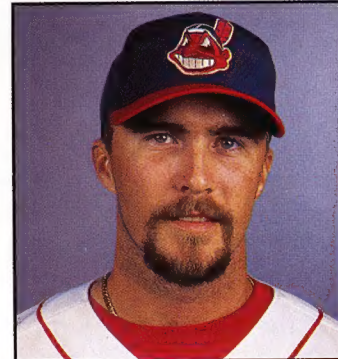
**Kenny
LOFTON**

7

Age: 33, born May 31, 1967
in East Chicago, IN

Position: Outfielder

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'0" Wt: 180



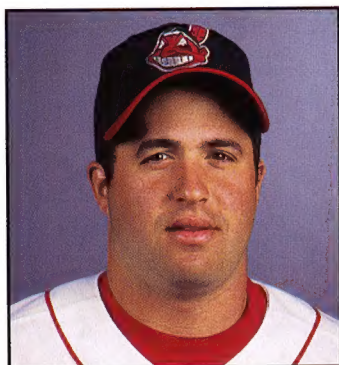
**Tom
MARTIN**

36

Age: 30, born May 21, 1970
in Charleston, SC

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/L Ht: 6'1" Wt: 200



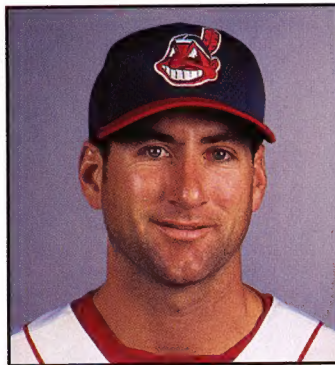
**John
McDONALD**

8

Age: 25, born September 24, 1974
in London, CT

Position: Infielder

B/T: R/R Ht: 5'11" Wt: 175



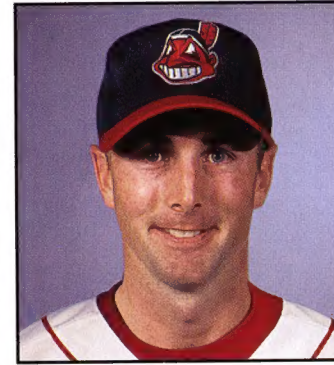
**Charles
NAGY**

41

Age: 33, born May 5, 1967
in Fairfield, CT

Position: Pitcher

B/T: L/R Ht: 6'3" Wt: 200



**Chan
PERRY**

61

Age: 27, born September 13, 1972
in Live Oak, FL

Position: Outfielder

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'2" Wt: 200



**Manny
RAMIREZ**

24

Age: 28, born May 30, 1972
in Santa Domingo, DR

Position: Outfielder

B/T: R/R Ht: 6'0" Wt: 205

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Weekly auctions begin Monday, April 3, and will last from 3PM Monday to 3PM the following Monday. The highest bidders at the conclusion of each weekly auction will be contacted via e-mail by the Indians for payment arrangements. Payments can be made by MasterCard, the preferred credit card of the Cleveland Indians, or by VISA, Discover, American Express or by check made payable to Cleveland Indians Charities. The items will be mailed upon receipt of payment.

The highest bidders will have 48 hours to respond to the e-mail notification of their bid selection before the next highest bidder will be awarded the item. Minimum bids for each item will range from \$50 - \$75. All items will include a letter of authenticity.

All proceeds benefit Cleveland Indians Charities which supports youth education and recreation programs in the Greater Cleveland area.

Auction items will vary each week, but may include banners, autographed jerseys, bats, helmets, and photographs.

